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SUBJECT: JORDAN'S ASSOCIATIONS LAW LIKELY TO TAKE EFFECT AS
DEBATE ON AMENDMENTS CREEPS AHEAD

REF: A. AMMAN 3117 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)B. AMMAN 2701

Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) When the King endorsed Jordan's controversial Law on Associations in September, he exacted a promise from PM Nader Al-Dahabi to amend the bill before it becomes the law of the land (Ref A). With that date (December 15) now just around the corner, civil society and government contacts are telling us of increased activity on the law within the government, suggesting movement on bringing the proposed amendments to parliament.

[1](#)2. (C) According to Nadia Al-Aloul, one of the sixteen NGO leaders involved in drafting the amendments, the original list of eight suggested changes is now down to four. In priority order, the amendments (summarized Ref B) deal with freedom of operation, foreign funding, dissolution, and registration. Civil society leaders remain hopeful that the process will result in a favorable outcome, but Aloul said that they are also "scared of making a wrong step that will cause the entire process to fall apart." As a result, they are erring on the side of caution, refraining from asking for status updates or complaining about lack of progress in the hopes that their champions in the government will deliver the amendments.

[1](#)3. (C) At the same time that their hopes are being raised, contacts tell us that disagreements over how to proceed are rampant in the cabinet. The question of registration is a key fault line, with security-oriented ministers arguing for extensive government reviews and permissions for new NGOs and reformist ministers arguing for simpler procedures. Denial of non-profit status is a similar issue, with some pushing for vague provisions which would allow for flexibility and others arguing for a law that requires the government to provide justification for any denial of non-profit status. Some ministries (Industry and Trade, for one) are even promoting a return to parts of the 1966 law, which allowed them to register certain NGOs and regulate their activities -- a move that would effectively annul one of the few benefits of the version passed in July, which consolidated authority over NGOs into a single ministry.

[1](#)4. (C) It seems likely that the law passed in July will enter into effect on December 15 before amendments can be passed. In preparation for this eventuality, the Ministry of Social Development has prepared regulations which the cabinet can quickly endorse as a short-term salve. These regulations go some way towards addressing the pernicious issue of foreign funding of Jordanian NGOs, which requires cabinet permission under the law as passed. Under the regulations, foreign governments, United Nations agencies, and international NGOs with Jordanian branches will be exempted from this requirement. In an interesting twist, the regulations reportedly create specific loopholes for the sixteen NGOs whose leaders asked the King to veto the law --

a move either designed to buy their silence or reward them for speaking out.

15. (C) Comment: Despite the PM's previous promise to give the amendments "urgent status," the parliament will likely take its time with the amendments, essentially ensuring that the law will enter into force on December 15. As reported Ref A, parliament remains a blind spot for most proponents of the bill, who significantly underestimate the ability of security-minded conservative MPs to undo the progress already made. In our meetings with NGO leaders and government officials, we are quietly reminding them of the necessity to create buy-in among MPs before the amendments are introduced in parliament. End Comment.
Beecroft